

OPENERS

Inside NCR

Into this age of union-bashing and the diminishing power and fortunes of workers, comes a heartening bit of news from Port Jervis, N.Y., where the Sisters of Mercy took hold of an ugly labor dispute at one of their hospitals and did what justice demands (page 6).

By seizing control of the hospital board, the sisters were able to settle a contract with striking registered nurses, nullifying the board's use of replacement workers, a particularly mean-spirited practice prohibited in most Western democracies. They also gave a public example of the church and its institutions putting into practice noble church teachings on the rights of workers.

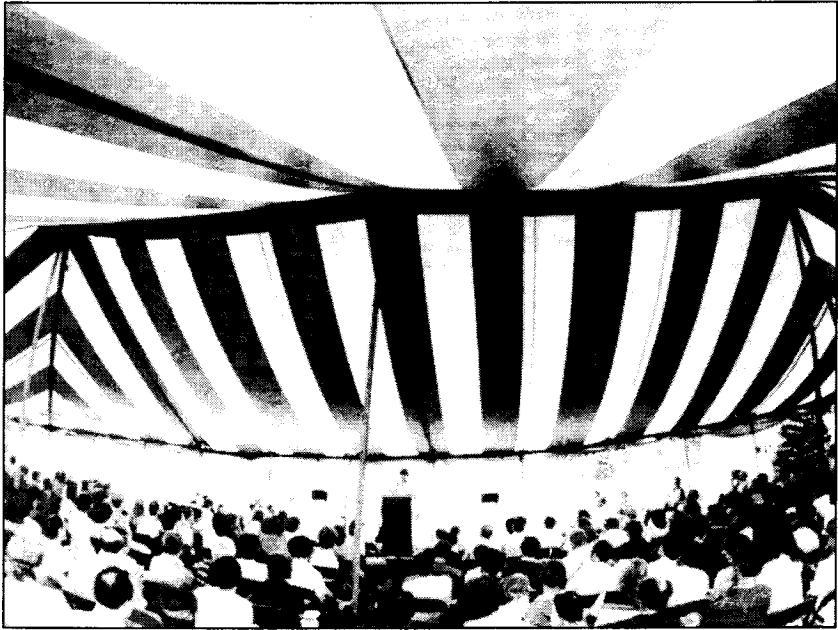
Once again, lessons from religious women.

On a darker note, the horrors of "ethnic cleansing" have not ended in Bosnia, as is clear in the report by Judy Ball on the continued rape of Bosnian Muslim women by Serbian soldiers (page 9). Those wishing to support the work of the Ecumenical Women's Solidarity Fund can send checks made out to the World Council of Churches to: Banque Scandinavie en Suisse/CP 901/Cours de Rive/1211 Geneva 3, Switzerland. Checks can also be directed to: Rape Genocide Law Project, PO Box 6413, Hamden, CT 06517.

You certainly get the feeling the Vatican has stirred a hornet's nest by its sacking of French Bishop Jacques Gaillot. Once the maverick bishop of the relatively obscure Evreux diocese, he moved last week into Paris, where he will be much more accessible to the media. "Now that I am in Paris, how am I going to avoid you?" he told awaiting journalists in front of his new home, an apartment building where several dozen homeless people have been squatting since Christmas. The building has become a symbol for the homeless. Like thousands of other Paris buildings, it had been standing empty awaiting redevelopment when the squatters moved in. Gaillot claims to represent those excluded from society, such as the homeless. Church officials have reminded French Catholics that many other priests and laity are engaged in similar work.

The U.S. Catholic Conference has done no favor to Catholic book publishers by agreeing to go through Doubleday to mass-market a paperback version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (page 3). Not only will it mean that a number of Catholic publishers will take big losses holding large inventories, but they stand to lose much-needed profits that could help them publish good Catholic books. Since the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Co. has not published the catechism, I can say without conflict of interest this was one poorly thought-out deal.

Tom Fox



"To begin the meeting will you all rise and go meet your neighbor? Let us shake hands and welcome each other. And let us sing our joy."

Lent can be a long night's journey into day

By MARY LOU KOWNACKI

When I think about the journey from darkness to light I remember a Pentecostal revival meeting and a book.

I was 16 before I had the courage to sneak into my first non-Catholic religious service. It was a revival meeting under a big tent in a vacant lot, two blocks from my house.

Four high school friends and I went under cover of night, conscious that we were flirting with the danger of everlasting fire — in the 1950s it was a mortal sin for Catholics to attend non-Catholic services.

We sat with superior smirks while the preacher ranted and raved about the evil tobacco weed and every sentence was met with foot-stomping and clapping and "Amen, brother, amen." But when Mrs. Woods began to describe her celestial visit, her ride in the flaming chariot with Elijah, it was too much. Try as we might — pressing our nostrils together, biting our lips — we could not contain our giggles. And just as Mrs. Woods was being swept into the bosom of Jesus and the sax wailed and the drummer picked up the tempo and the congregation was on its feet swaying and wailing, the five of us rushed for the exit.

"Boy," I laughed, "are they ever stupid."

"Amen, sister, alleluia," answered Pat.

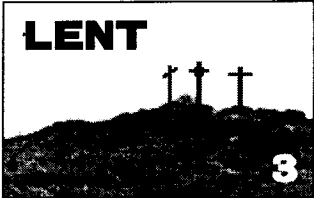
I don't know why I returned, but I did. The next evening I found myself standing in the back of the tent watching. It was early but already about 20 people were seated on the long, backless benches. I noticed that some faces were dressed poorly and recognized some faces from the night before.

Benedictine Sr. Mary Lou Kownacki lives in Erie, Pa.

Just as the Angelus bells began to ring at my parish church, Holy Trinity, the preacher picked up the mike. "To begin the meeting will you all rise and go meet your neighbor? Let us shake hands and welcome each other. And let us sing our joy."

The band started and the people stood, marched around the tent, shook hands and sang: "Oh, when the saints go marching in/Oh, when the saints go marching in/Oh, Lord, I want to be in that number ..."

I dug the toe of my sneakers into the dirt and lowered my eyes, embarrassed at this open display of affection at a religious service.



We're talking pre-Vatican II here, when people did not even dare talk to their neighbors in a Catholic church, let alone greet each other with a kiss of peace.

I looked up just in time to see a man, toothless and grinning, approaching me, his hand extended. Our eyes met. I remembered my snickers from the previous night. Quickly I turned and stepped through the tent flap — shamed.

The next person who led me from darkness to light was a character in a book. His name was Paul and he was the main character in *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

Up to the revival experience, I thought all non-Catholics were spiritually inferior. Prior to reading Erich Remarque's

World War I classic, I thought all enemies of my country were evil. But here was the young German soldier, Paul, fighting against my country, and with each page I cared about him more deeply. The "enemy" had friends, a family, wanted to be a writer, loved to read ... the "enemy" was just like me. Paul and I even shared the same favorite food — potato pancakes.

How I sobbed when Paul went home on a brief furlough and his mother crawled out of a sickbed to prepare potato pancakes for her son. How it reminded me of how my own asthmatic mother demonstrated her love for me and my brothers the best way she could — through hours of food preparation.

After meeting Paul, the word *enemy* lost its horror; war, the institution designed to kill enemies, lost its luster and meaning.

A Hasidic tale tells about an old rabbi who asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun. Then he answered: "It's when you can look at the face of any man or woman and see that it is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night."

That's what the three close friends of Jesus learned on the Mountain of Transfiguration — in every human being lives the divine. When they looked at Jesus and found the divine, they were told to leave the mountaintop and find the divine in the lame, the blind, the hypocrite, the Samaritan. It was the beginning of their escape from the night of prejudice, bigotry, moral superiority, hatred and fear of the stranger, the enemy, the other.

Though not as dramatic or mystical, the toothless man in the revival tent and the young soldier, Paul, were my moments of transfiguration, my companions on the journey from darkness to light. ■